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ABSTRACT

The Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) Making Schools Work (MSW) initiative works with clusters of high schools and their feeder middle grades to raise student achievement in rural areas. MSW is based on the belief that all students can complete an "advantaged" curriculum, although some students may require more time, individualized instruction, encouragement, and direction. In working with rural high schools, SREB has identified specific problems, such as low expectations and lack of resources, that often prevent rural schools and communities from raising student achievement. Clusters of rural high schools and their feeder middle grades are working with SREB to set higher standards, improve instruction, align the curriculum, develop an extra-help system, and connect schools and homes. MSW also focuses on transition in an effort to reduce the number of students who enter ninth grade unprepared for high school. This document provides information on major goals; key practices and key conditions for accelerating student achievement; the MSW-recommended curriculum for students in the middle grades and high school; indicators for moving from middle grades to high school and from high school to postsecondary education or the workplace; the MSW program for transition between eighth and ninth grades and between 12th grade and postsecondary activities; and ways to plan for success and measure progress. The benefits of MSW are listed, followed by an outline of the responsibilities of SREB and the states and school districts participating in MSW. (TD)

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SREB

Making Schools Work:

Raising Student Achievement in Rural Middle Grades and High Schools

The Southern Regional Education Board's *Making Schools Work (MSW)* initiative works with clusters of high schools and their feeder middle grades to raise student achievement in rural areas. *Making Schools Work* is based on the belief that all students can complete an "advantaged" curriculum. Some students may require more time, individualized instruction, encouragement and direction, but *MSW* is convinced that all students can learn challenging content in the right environment. *MSW* is designed to support schools in preparing all students to meet higher standards.

Too many students leave the middle grades ill-equipped to do high school work, and too many young people graduate from high school unable to pass employers' exams or to enter postsecondary education without taking remedial courses. *MSW* is committed to raising student achievement through a comprehensive school-reform effort.

Clusters of rural high schools and their feeder middle grades are working with SREB to set higher standards, improve instruction, align the curriculum, utilize an extra-help system, and connect schools and homes. *MSW* also focuses on transition in an effort to reduce the number of students who enter ninth grade unprepared for high school.

In working with rural high schools, SREB has identified specific problems, such as low expectations and lack of resources, that often prevent rural schools and communities from raising student achievement. The *MSW* initiative addresses many of the issues that affect the ability of rural areas to improve their schools.

SREB has learned important lessons from its long-term effort to improve high schools and from its recent research on middle grades. *MSW* seeks to accelerate academic achievement in middle grades and high school by changing 1) what students are taught; 2) how they are taught; 3) when they are taught certain academic subjects; 4) how teachers relate to students, other teachers and parents; and 5) how teachers receive support. Such wide-scale changes are complex and require hard work and commitment over a long period of time. There is no "quick fix" in getting students to learn and to apply what they learn. In simple terms, if all students are taught as if they are gifted and talented, all students can master a rigorous and challenging curriculum.

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Major Goals

Student achievement is the thing that matters most in *Making Schools Work*. When the community, the local board of education, the superintendent, and middle grades and high school leaders agree that learning is the top priority, they send a powerful message that inspires change. District and school leaders in *MSW* support efforts to:

- Increase the percentage of middle grades students who perform at the proficient level in reading, mathematics and science on the *Making Schools Work* Assessment, which is based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

- Increase the percentage of middle grades students who complete a rigorous core curriculum of mathematics, reading, English/language arts, science and social studies courses taught by highly qualified teachers who engage students in relevant, hands-on activities that prepare them for success in high school.

- Increase the percentage of high school students who perform at the proficient level in core academic subjects — reading, mathematics and science — as measured by the *Making Schools Work* Assessment.

- Increase the percentage of high school students who complete college-preparatory studies in mathematics, science, language arts and social studies and a concentration in an academic area, a career/technical area or a blend of academic and career/technical studies.

About SREB

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the nation's first interstate compact for education, was created in 1948 by Southern governors. SREB helps educational and governmental leaders work cooperatively to advance education and, in doing so, improve the region's social and economic life.

SREB assists state leaders by identifying and directing attention to key issues; collecting, compiling and analyzing comparable data; and initiating studies and discussions that lead to recommendations for state and institutional action.

SREB's concern with the need to better prepare high school students began in the early 1980s with a series of publications dealing with projected supply and demand in a number of professions. In its report, The Need for Quality, SREB offered recommendations for educational improvement, including several that addressed vocational-technical education.

The SREB publication *Goals for Education 2000*, which spurred action in SREB states, also included a number of goals related to raising the achievement of high school students. SREB's concern with the middle grades began in the late 1990s with a series of publications dealing with the quality of teaching and learning in the middle grades.

Key Practices for Accelerating Student Achievement

Professional development and support are more likely to affect school and classroom practices and student performance if they are aligned to a framework of practices that provide direction and meaning to comprehensive school improvement and to learning. *MSW*'s nine key practices provide a framework for improving middle grades and high school education and increasing student achievement in grades six through 12.

- ☐ **High expectations.** Set higher expectations and get all students to meet them. Students learn in different ways and at different speeds. The total curriculum should focus on accelerating the achievement of all students.

- ☐ **Middle grades academic courses.** Get middle grades students to complete an academic core that accelerates their learning, challenges them to achieve at a higher level, and appeals to their interests.

- ☐ **High school program of study.** Get high school students to complete a challenging program of study with an upgraded academic core and a concentration.

- ☐ **Career/technical studies.** Provide opportunities for middle grades and high school students to engage in career/technical studies and to explore and integrate technology into academic studies and fine, practical and related arts through activities and applications. Involve high school students in challenging career/technical studies and emphasize the importance of high-level mathematics, science, language arts and problem-solving skills in the context of the modern workplace.

- ☐ **Students actively engaged.** Provide a variety of learning activities to help middle grades and high school students link challenging academic content to real-world applications. Students should learn to solve problems, conduct research, analyze and interpret data, defend conclusions, use scientific investigation methods, design and implement research, recognize patterns and trends, reflect on written materials, respond orally and in writing, and work in teams.

- ☐ **Teachers working together.** Give all teachers time to work together to plan, develop and conduct high-quality learning experiences and to share student work that meets standards.

- ☐ **Guidance.** Base guidance activities on the belief that all students matter and that they need long-term personal relationships with adults at the school who will work with them and their parents to set learning goals and to develop education and career plans. Each student should have an education and career plan that covers four years of high school and the first two years after graduation. The plan should be jointly developed by a teacher-adviser, a student and his/her parents.

- ☐ **Extra help.** Provide a structured system of extra help and quality time that will enable middle grades and high school students to complete an accelerated program of study and to meet rigorous and consistent standards. Instruction and assessment should provide multiple opportunities for students to meet standards.

- ☐ **Data.** Use data on student achievement and school and classroom practices to revise the curriculum and instruction. The continuous use of data helps advance student learning and identifies students who meet curriculum and performance goals. Participating schools use baseline data from the *MSW* Assessment, state tests, the SAT/ACT, follow-up studies of eighth- and 12th-graders, dropout and attendance records, and other information to make changes in school and classroom practices.

Key Conditions for Accelerating Student Achievement

Making Schools Work is based on the belief that school board members and district and school leaders must be actively involved with teachers in designing improvement strategies, allocating resources, and developing an accountability process. Most importantly, they should align themselves with teachers by supporting improvement strategies. Several conditions are fundamental in using the *MSW* model to improve learning:

- **A clear mission statement.** District and school leadership is needed to develop a strong mission statement concerning the preparation of middle grades students for success in challenging high school studies and the preparation of high school graduates for success in postsecondary education and the workplace.

- **Strong district leadership.** Middle grades and high school leaders and teachers need strong support from the district office and the local school board to align the curriculum in grades six through 12 and to benchmark the curriculum to national and state standards. When this is done, each grade and/or course will have standards that define content and skills and will have a number of examples of student work that meets the standards.

- **Strong school leadership.** Middle grades and high schools need strong, effective principals who encourage their teachers, help them plan and implement research-based practices, and provide leadership for improving curriculum and instruction.

- **Qualified teachers.** Middle grades and high school teachers must have in-depth knowledge of their subjects and of how to teach students in grades six through 12. Middle grades teachers who lack majors or minors in their teaching assignments must receive support to return to school to obtain a major or a minor as a condition for continued employment. The school board and the superintendent should agree not to hire teachers unless they meet this qualification.

- **Support for staff development.** District and school leaders must provide leadership and financial support for instructional materials, joint planning time, and professional development on new curricula and research-based instructional methods. They also must give guidance and direction as teachers implement new practices.

- **Planning for continuous improvement.** District and school leaders must create an organizational structure and a process that will ensure their continuous involvement with faculty in decisions about what to teach, how to teach, what to expect students to learn, and how to evaluate student learning. Leaders need to support faculty study teams that will address problems in instruction and student learning.

Many middle grades and high schools traditionally have sorted students into two groups: those who are considered capable of doing college-level work and those who are not. These schools have prepared the "best" students to enroll in higher education and have left the "rest" to enter the unskilled work force. The MSW *philosophy is that all students can complete an "advantaged" curriculum, although some students may require more time, individualized instruction, encouragement and direction.* MSW *is designed to support teachers and schools as they prepare all students to meet high standards.*

The *MSW*-recommended curriculum for middle grades students

The *MSW* middle grades curriculum gives all students in grades six through eight access to a challenging curriculum that will lead to success in high school.

Mathematics: By the end of grade eight, all students will pass a pre-algebra proficiency test and will be able to use algebra to solve problems, or they will complete Algebra I with acceptable performance.

Science: All students will use laboratory and technology experiences to learn scientific concepts in physical, life and earth/space sciences.

Reading: Students will read in all content areas and will use reading skills to become independent learners.

Language Arts: By the end of grade eight, students will use language skills correctly and effectively and will be able to find, organize and report information through extensive reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Social Studies: By the end of grade eight, students will be able to describe their heritage, their government, the world in which they live, and key economic principles from studying issues of the past, present and future.

The *MSW*-recommended curriculum for high school students

The *MSW* high school curriculum gives all students access to a college-preparatory academic core and an academic or a career concentration.

Four credits in college-preparatory English courses that emphasize reading, writing and presentation skills. Students will read a variety of books in and out of class, make presentations, write short assignments daily, and complete at least one major research paper per year. Students will revise their work until it meets standards.

Four credits in mathematics, including Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II and a higher-level mathematics course such as trigonometry, statistics, pre-calculus, calculus or the College Board's Pacesetter Mathematics. Students will solve complex problems, develop alternative solutions, and apply mathematics knowledge and skills to address real-world problems. Mathematics teachers will provide opportunities for students to discuss mathematical concepts with each other to increase understanding of key ideas.

Three credits in science, including at least two units in college-preparatory biology, chemistry, anatomy/physiology or physics/applied physics. Students will conduct lab experiments and do investigative studies; read, critique and discuss three to five books or equivalent articles about scientists and scientific discoveries; keep lab notebooks; make presentations; and complete research projects and written reports. Students will design and conduct a group or individual project.

Three credits in college-preparatory social studies courses that require students to read five to eight books or equivalent articles, write weekly, make presentations, complete research projects and prepare at least one major research paper in each course.

Four credits above the academic core in either a career/technical, an academic or a blended academic and career/technical concentration. Students will study one area in depth and will use reading, writing, mathematics and science to complete projects and assignments. Students will have a choice of at least four career/technical concentrations and at least two academic majors such as mathematics/science and humanities. One or two courses in each academic major will be an Advanced Placement course. The concentrations can be developed in collaboration with postsecondary institutions.

Readiness Indicators

MSW will identify and validate indicators of students' readiness to move from middle grades to high school and from high school to post secondary studies and/or employment. These "readiness indicators" will help teachers, students and parents understand what students need to know and be able to do to move successfully to the next level. By using current research and the *High Schools That Work* database, SREB has established tentative indicators for *MSW*. SREB, its research partners, states and local school systems will conduct studies and will validate and modify the indicators. *MSW* encourages participating schools to expand and experiment with additional readiness indicators.

Indicators for moving from grade eight to high school

- **Students meet *MSW* performance goals and score at the proficient level on the *MSW* Assessment of reading, mathematics and science.** Indicators of proficiency are:

  Reading — Eighth-graders demonstrate an overall understanding of written materials, including literal and inferred information. When reading eighth-grade-level materials, students extend the ideas by making clear inferences, drawing conclusions and connecting the content to their own experiences, including other reading experiences. They can identify some of the devices authors use in writing.

  Mathematics — Eighth-graders understand the connections between fractions, percentages, decimals and other mathematical topics such as algebra and mathematical functions. Students understand basic arithmetic operations and can solve problems in practical situations. Students are familiar with quantity and spatial relationships in problem solving and reasoning and can reason beyond arithmetic. They compare and contrast mathematical ideas and generate their own examples. They make inferences from data and graphs, apply properties of informal geometry, and use technology. Students understand how to gather and organize information and can calculate, evaluate and communicate results through statistics and probability.

  Science — Eighth-graders interpret data from simple tables and make inferences about the outcomes of experimental procedures. They understand the life sciences and are familiar with some aspects of animal behavior and ecological relationships. Students can evaluate the appropriateness of the design of an experiment. They have in-depth scientific knowledge, including an increasing understanding of physical science, and can apply knowledge to interpret information from written materials and graphs. Students can design, conduct, analyze and report on a scientific investigation. They can also present an oral report that is interesting, logical and scientifically accurate.

- **Students complete pre-algebra or Algebra I and score at the proficient level on an end-of-course test.**
- **Students read a variety and a large number of books (at least 25 per year) on at least an eighth-grade level.**
- **Students can find and organize information and write a report to answer a question or solve a problem.**
- **Students can write competently.**
- **Students can select and use appropriate technology to complete school assignments.**

Indicators for moving from grade 12 to postsecondary education and/or the workplace

- **Students meet *MSW* performance goals and score at the proficient level on the *MSW* Assessment of reading, mathematics and science.** Indicators of proficiency are:

  Reading — Twelfth-graders show an overall understanding of written materials, including inferential as well as literal information. They can extend ideas from the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions, and making connections to their personal experiences and other readings. Students can apply information from the text to a specific situation and can combine background information with ideas in the text to draw and support conclusions. When reading to perform a task, students can apply information or directions appropriately. They also can use personal experiences to evaluate the usefulness of information.

  Mathematics — Students can represent, interpret and perform multi-step operations with fractions and decimals. They can locate fractions and decimals on number lines; simplify fractions; and recognize the equivalence between common fractions and decimals, including pictorial representations. They know the meaning of percentages less than and greater than 100 and can apply the concept of percentages to solve multi-step problems. Students can use mathematical notation to interpret expressions, including those with exponents and negative integers. In measurement, students can find the perimeters and areas of rectangles, relate common units of measure, and use proportional relationships to solve routine problems involving similar triangles and scale drawings. In geometry, they know the definitions and properties of geometric figures and solids. In data analysis, students can calculate averages; select and interpret data from tables, pictographs and line graphs; compute relative frequency distributions; and understand simple bias. In algebra, they can graph points in the Cartesian plane and can use algebra to simplify an expression by collecting like terms, identify the solution to open linear sentences and inequalities by substitution and checking, and graph an interval representing a compound inequality from a written description. They can determine and apply a rule for simple functional relations and extend a numerical pattern.

  Science — Students can evaluate the appropriateness of the design of an experiment and can apply detailed scientific knowledge in interpreting information from text and graphs. These students also exhibit a growing and advanced understanding of physical science principles. They understand basic ecological principles and can interpret information in somewhat detailed graphs. They are developing an understanding of the nature of science, i.e. they know which questions in a series can be answered most easily with an experiment. They also know how scientists deal with conflicting hypotheses. Students can do scientific research, design and conduct experiments, analyze data, reach conclusions, and report results.

- **Students complete the *MSW*-recommended academic core and either an academic, a career or a blended concentration.**

- **Students are proficient in written skills, including doing research and organizing and synthesizing information into a coherent paper with proper documentation.**

- **Students can produce and present an oral report that has been developed logically.**

- **Students use time, money, materials and other resources wisely.**

- **Students work in teams, teach and lead others, negotiate solutions and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds.**

- **Students can acquire and evaluate data, organize information, interpret and communicate, and use computers to process information.**

- **Students can select and use appropriate technology.**

The *MSW* Transition Program

Meeting the overall goals of *MSW* will require some intermediate goals, including one aimed at increasing the percentage of students completing Algebra I, geometry and two years of college-preparatory-level English by the end of grade 10. To reach this goal, middle grades educators will need to reduce the percentage of entering ninth-graders who lack the knowledge and skills needed for success in high school. Educators must devise a system to help these students catch up. *MSW* urges middle grades and high school leaders and teachers to implement a four-part strategy for improving transition and reducing the failure and dropout rates. The strategy consists of:

- **a "gearing-up" program in which middle grades and high school leaders identify students who need accelerated mathematics, language arts and reading instruction in grades seven and eight.** An orientation for parents and students focuses on the need to prepare students for high school studies. Teachers use instructional techniques that motivate students to work harder and provide extra help and extra time to assist students in meeting standards and readiness indicators.

- **a four- to six-week summer "bridge" program for entering ninth-graders who need further study to succeed in high school.** The strongest language arts and mathematics teachers should teach in this program, which focuses on reading, mathematics, study and computer skills, and career and education awareness. The daily program consists of two hours of reading and writing and two hours of mathematics. Four days per week, students spend two hours using a computer to complete reading, writing and mathematics assignments. On the fifth day, students participate in two hours of field trips and other experiences that show the need for academic studies.

- **"double doses" of English and mathematics in grade nine.** Students who are not ready to take college-prep English and Algebra I in grade nine can enroll in a special two-semester program. The program consists of:

First Semester

- ☐ A **language arts course** that stresses high-interest team reading, writing and grammar. The course prepares students to take a ninth-grade college-prep language arts course in the second semester.

- ☐ A **mathematics course** that stresses arithmetic and pre-algebra. This transitional course prepares students to take Algebra I in the second semester.

- ☐ A **study skills and guidance course** that stresses study habits, note-taking, job shadowing and visits to high school vocational-technical labs, or a **computer course** that focuses on databases, word processing, PowerPoint, Internet, e-mail, etc.

- ☐ **Physical science or social studies** taught at the college-prep level. The science course includes lab experiments and use of scientific methods.

Second semester

- ☐ College-preparatory-level ninth-grade **English** and **Algebra I** and either the **study skills and guidance course** or the **computer course**, plus **physical science** or **social studies**.

- ☐ Extra help and extra time for students who need assistance in meeting the standards of an accelerated curriculum in grades seven through 12. Teachers focus on getting students to meet high standards and provide additional help before and after school and on Saturdays.

Continuous Planning for Success

MSW asks participating high schools to reduce the percentage of graduates who need remedial courses in college and are unable to pass employers' exams. High schools can take the following actions:

- ☐ Adopt a flexible schedule that allows students to earn 32 credits in four years.
- ☐ Require 28 credits for graduation, including four credits in either a mathematics and science concentration, a humanities concentration, or a career concentration.
- ☐ Work with postsecondary institutions to administer their placement exams to students in grade 11. Use the information to work with parents and students to modify the program of study to prepare 12th-graders for postsecondary studies.
- ☐ Require all students to take three rigorous academic courses in senior year, including a college-preparatory-level mathematics course.

How is progress measured?

MSW and its partners collect and use data from a number of sources to chart schools' progress in improving student achievement. *MSW* facilitators help school leaders use the data to develop and revise school-improvement plans.

- ☐ The *MSW* Student Assessment of reading, mathematics and science is administered to a random sample of students across grades eight and 12.
- ☐ Students participating in the assessment complete a survey of their middle grades and high school experiences, including what and how they have been taught, what has been expected of them, and how much effort they and the school have exerted. This survey helps teachers and school leaders see the connection between student performance and the quality of classroom experiences.
- ☐ High school students complete a transcript study that relates their reading, mathematics and science achievement to the courses they have taken.
- ☐ Administrators, teachers and counselors at each *MSW* cluster participate in a survey that reveals how much time teachers spend planning and working together, what they think of the school climate and the quality of instruction, and what types of staff development they need in achieving quality learning for students and overall school improvement.
- ☐ Principals of the middle grades and high schools complete a survey to assess school and classroom policies and practices.
- ☐ One year after high school, graduates report what they are doing and how well their middle grades and high school experiences prepared them for the workplace and postsecondary education.
- ☐ Outside teams conduct technical assistance visits to determine the progress of *MSW* sites in improving student achievement. Each visit results in a no-nonsense report of actions the school can take to advance student learning.

SREB's Research Partners

Research Triangle Institute (RTI) will evaluate the implementation and effects of *MSW* on school practices and student achievement. RTI staff members will gather data by visiting schools, reviewing documents and studying the results of the biennial *MSW* Assessment. They will analyze the data and prepare special reports. RTI will help SREB and *MSW* school clusters use data to identify which practices work and which do not work in breaking down barriers and reinforcing bridges to school improvement.

Educational Testing Service (ETS) will design the *MSW* NAEP-based exams in reading, mathematics and science; prepare and distribute test materials to the schools; and compile and disseminate the results to states and schools.

How will *Making Schools Work* benefit you and your school?

Benefits to students. *MSW* encourages students to complete high-level courses in grades six through 12. A rigorous program of study improves students' thinking, decision-making, and academic and technical skills, and connects knowledge to the real world. Students see links between school studies and their personal goals for a career and further study.

Benefits to teachers. Teachers gain confidence in their ability to help all students complete challenging studies. They join their colleagues in other subject areas and participate in vertical teams to create a more rigorous curriculum and to plan staff development aimed at improving student achievement.

Benefits to principals. Principals strengthen their ability to support, guide, encourage and work with teachers to improve curriculum, instruction and student learning. Principals become adept at using a continuous and incremental planning process — planning, doing, reviewing, making new plans and revising old ones. School leaders and teachers discover that they can improve the performance of all students, even those who may have been underserved in the past.

Benefits to schools. Middle grades and high schools receive data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students in grades eight and 12 in reading, mathematics, science and technical studies. This data — coupled with information from teacher and student surveys — becomes the basis for school-improvement plans developed by administrators, teachers and community leaders. As a result, students, parents, employers and postsecondary representatives communicate with and support the school.

Benefits to educational reform. States are partners with SREB in implementing *Making Schools Work*. Within the *MSW* framework of goals, key conditions and key practices, states adopt new ways to work with local school systems long-term to improve teaching and learning in middle grades and high schools.

Benefits to the community, state and nation. *MSW*'s challenging program of study increases students' communication, mathematics, science and technical literacy. Curriculum alignment in grades six through 12 and integrated learning across the curriculum prepare students for success at the local, state and national levels.

Students learn more when the school and the community commit to enrolling all students in a challenging program of study, motivating them to meet high standards and providing extra help as needed.

What do states agree to do?

States participating in *MSW* agree to:

- ☐ Work with the district to pay half the cost of the *MSW* Assessment. (One hundred students, chosen randomly from grades eight and 12, will participate in the assessment in the first, third and fifth years.)
- ☐ Work with SREB and the *MSW* clusters to provide staff development and technical assistance aligned to school-improvement plans. The services will include:
  - ◇ co-hosting site development workshops;
  - ◇ conducting follow-up visits to help new *MSW* clusters build consensus for a site action plan;
  - ◇ providing follow-up coaching after a technical assistance visit to help a cluster translate recommendations into improved school and classroom practices; and
  - ◇ helping site teams begin to improve curriculum and instruction in the first year.
- ☐ Participate in technical assistance visits.
- ☐ Create opportunities for *MSW* sites to network, share resources and solve problems they have in common.
- ☐ Link *MSW* sites to other school-improvement initiatives in the state and identify and promote opportunities for joint staff development activities and funding.
- ☐ Designate two representatives from the State Department of Education to serve on the *MSW* Board of Directors.

What do school districts agree to do?

Districts participating in *Making Schools Work* agree to:

- ☐ Promote a vision of high achievement by all students among teachers, students, parents and community leaders.
- ☐ Work with cluster schools to support curriculum alignment in grades six through 12.
- ☐ Participate in a baseline assessment in the first year and in assessments in the third and fifth years. Schools will use SREB's guidelines in selecting a minimum of 100 students in each grade — eight and 12.
- ☐ Participate in all *MSW* surveys of students, teachers and administrators.
- ☐ Name a district coordinator and a site coordinator at each cluster school.
- ☐ Participate in all required staff development activities provided to the cluster.
- ☐ Create and implement a three-year improvement plan based on the *MSW* goals, key practices and key conditions.
- ☐ Organize a committee or team to develop and implement the improvement plan.
- ☐ Encourage teachers and give them the flexibility to define problems and to change what and how they teach.
- ☐ Assign middle grades teachers to content areas in which they are certified.

- ☐ Hire middle grades teachers who have earned a major or a minor in the content areas they will teach and help current teachers earn their credentials as needed.

- ☐ Improve transition from the middle grades to high school by reducing the number of students who enter grade nine unprepared to do high-school-level work and by devising a catch-up system for ninth-graders who need extra help.

- ☐ Improve transition from high school to postsecondary studies and/or the workplace.

What does SREB agree to do?

SREB agrees to provide leadership, guidance, information and assistance to support schools, districts and states in improving student achievement. SREB will:

- ☐ Pay half the cost of the *MSW* Assessment and work with ETS as it prepares and scores the assessment and compiles and analyzes the results.

- ☐ Develop an in-depth profile of each participating school to identify challenges and to develop an improvement design.

- ☐ Prepare materials on school improvement, and review and recommend research-based curriculum materials that support standards-based education.

- ☐ Develop and disseminate school-improvement guides to help schools implement the *MSW* framework.

- ☐ Create staff development packages for site-specific and national staff development programs.

- ☐ Work with the schools to determine site-specific staff development needs.

- ☐ Help the schools plan and implement site-specific staff development to support teachers in changing what and how they teach.

- ☐ Manage and lead a site-development workshop to each cluster.

- ☐ Manage and lead a three-day on-site technical assistance visit to each cluster.

- ☐ Provide an improvement facilitator to work closely with the clusters throughout the *MSW* project. The facilitator will provide technical assistance and will coordinate the delivery of services to the cluster.

- ☐ Evaluate sites' progress in raising student achievement by coordinating biennial assessments, analyzing and disseminating results, and providing state and site assessment reports.

- ☐ Provide a range of information and dissemination services by using print, video and Internet resources.

- ☐ Establish a technology-based communication network and support system to facilitate staff development, technical assistance and networking among the sites. The network will include Web pages, listserv capability and Web-based courses.

Making Schools Work is based on certain views about change.

Change is a continuous process. An ongoing process of planning and improvement is necessary to raise student achievement. The process should involve district, school and teacher leaders; parents and community leaders; and an outside facilitator.

Change is data-driven. Administrators and teachers use data to determine what works and what does not work in improving curriculum, instruction and student achievement.

Change builds on current strengths. Many good practices exist in schools. A comprehensive school-improvement effort will build on strengths and will use the *MSW* framework of goals, key practices and key conditions to identify needed actions.

Change should be customized. Local leaders need to develop a comprehensive school-improvement plan that is customized to the unique strengths and needs of the cluster.

Change involves district and community support. Change occurs when the local board of education, the superintendent, the principal and the community support the effort. Planning and implementation teams should be composed of leaders from the school, the district and the community. District and school leaders should support teachers as they participate in two kinds of teams: 1) a team to plan and implement integrated units and activities across the curriculum and 2) a team that engages teachers from the same subject areas in planning together and aligning the curriculum in grades six through 12.

Change is accelerated by outside expertise. Administrators and teachers need support from outside consultants to develop goals, objectives and strategies. Expert consultants can make technical assistance visits, interpret data and provide site-based staff development.

Change occurs when schools improve their practices. Schools need to make structural changes to raise student achievement. They should:

- offer the *MSW*-recommended curriculum in middle grades and high school;
- develop a strong guidance and advisement system that includes parents;
- establish a system of required extra help; and
- align the curriculum to higher standards and define the level of student work that will meet the standards.

Change is based on paying attention to the "little things." Schools can change many small things immediately in efforts to raise student achievement. These things include creating a climate in which:

- students arrive on time and are ready to learn;
- teachers have adequate materials and planning time;
- students complete challenging assignments and meaningful homework;
- students do homework at home rather than at school;
- teachers require students to re-do work until it meets standards; and
- students understand that effort is as important as ability and that hard work will be rewarded.

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